



PRESS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release

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**THREE SENTENCED IN MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR
FOOD STAMP FRAUD CONSPIRACY**

Tampa, Florida - On Monday, October 27, 2003, U.S. District Judge James S. Moody, sentenced three defendants to prison time for their involvement in a conspiracy to commit food stamp fraud which involved a loss to the government in excess of \$2.5 million. Haydee Alvarez was sentenced to 55 months' imprisonment and ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$2,631,459.65 to the United States Department of Agriculture ("USDA"). Syliva Martinez was sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment and ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$2,319,167.42 to the USDA. Gilberto Sanchez was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment and ordered to pay \$368,784.45 in restitution to the USDA. Jose Banguera, a fourth defendant involved with the food stamp conspiracy, was sentenced by Judge Moody on August 29, 2003, to 24 months' imprisonment, and ordered to pay \$455,795.77 in restitution to the USDA. Additionally, the Court also found Alvarez, Martinez, Sanchez, and Banguera jointly and severally liable to the United States for a money judgement in the amount of \$500,000.00.

Alvarez, Martinez, Sanchez, and Banguera each pled guilty to conspiracy to commit food stamp fraud. Alvarez, Sanchez, and Banguera pled guilty on April 30, 2003, and Martinez pled guilty on April 2, 2003. According to court documents, Alvarez, Martinez, Sanchez, and Banguera worked at the Bodega Grocery, located at 3414 North 15th Street, Tampa, Florida, at which they were exchanging food stamp coupons for a lesser amount of cash. The food stamp conspiracy involved a total loss to the government of \$2,631,459.65.

The case was investigated by the United States Secret Service Financial Investigative Task Force, which consisted of the United States Secret Service; United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Public Assistance Fraud Unit; Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, and the Tampa Police Department. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Anthony Porcelli, and Assistant United States Attorney Bryant Camareno.